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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: JORDAN SCHEDULES PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS FOR JUNE
17

Classified By: A/DCM DOUGLAS SILLIMAN, REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

11. (U) THE JORDANIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ON FEBRUARY 27 THAT LOWER HOUSE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, POSTPONED THREE TIMES, WILL BE HELD ON JUNE 17. THE GOVERNMENT FURTHER ANNOUNCED THAT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR JULY 5 WOULD BE DELAYED UNTIL JULY 26 TO ALLOW FOR A PRUDENT AMOUNT OF TIME BETWEEN THE TWO ELECTION DATES. MOST POLITICAL PARTIES WELCOMED THE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT AND VIEWED THE KING'S DECISION AS A VERY POSITIVE STEP. THE ISLAMIC ACTION FRONT (IAF), JORDAN'S LARGEST OPPOSITION PARTY, SUGGESTED THAT MERELY SETTING A DATE FOR ELECTIONS DID NOT GO FAR ENOUGH AND CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO INTRODUCE AN ELECTIONS LAW GUARANTEEING EQUAL REPRESENTATION TO ALL SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY AND DECIDING WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SUPERVISING THE ENTIRE ELECTORAL PROCESS. WE BELIEVE THE KING WANTS TO MOVE AHEAD WITH ELECTIONS IN JUNE, UNLESS THERE IS SERIOUS INSTABILITY IN THE REGION. END SUMMARY

FOURTH TIME'S THE CHARM?

12. (U) THE KING DISSOLVED THE LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT IN JUNE 2001. THE CONSTITUTION CALLS FOR NEW ELECTIONS WITHIN FOUR MONTHS AFTER THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PARLIAMENT UNLESS THERE ARE COMPELLING CIRCUMSTANCES DEEMED TO IMPEDE ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ON THREE PREVIOUS OCCASIONS GENERAL TIME PERIODS FOR NEW ELECTIONS, YET NEVER SET SPECIFIC DATES TO HOLD THEM, AND EVENTUALLY POSTPONED THEM EACH TIME. THUS FAR, MANY OF THE KINGDOM'S POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE REACTED POSITIVELY YET CAUTIOUSLY TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT. MOST VIEW THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION AS A VERY POSITIVE STEP, YET ARE SKEPTICAL THAT ELECTIONS WILL ACTUALLY TAKE PLACE GIVEN THE POSSIBILITY OF HOSTILITIES IN IRAQ.

POLITICAL PARTIES REACT

13. (C) AMONG THE MOST VOCAL OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES REACTING TO THE GOVERNMENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT WAS THE IAF, THE POLITICAL ARM OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, WHICH BOYCOTTED THE 1997 ELECTIONS. IN A MARCH 2ND PRESS INTERVIEW, IAF SECRETARY GENERAL HAMZA MANSOUR STATED, "THERE ARE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SETTING A DATE, INCLUDING CHARTING A DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS LAW AND DECIDING WHO SHOULD SUPERVISE THE PROCESS." THE IAF IS A STRONG OPPONENT OF THE "ONE MAN ONE VOTE" FORMULA OF THE CURRENT ELECTIONS LAW, FAVORING INSTEAD THE INTRODUCTION OF A PROPORTIONAL LIST THAT WOULD PROVIDE THE IAF--JORDAN'S ONLY ORGANIZED NATIONWIDE POLITICAL PARTY--WITH A GREATER CHANCE OF SUCCESS IN ELECTIONS (ADDITIONAL DETAILS SEPTEL). MORE CENTRIST PARTIES, BY CONTRAST, ENTHUSIASTICALLY WELCOMED THE GOVERNMENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT AND URGED JORDANIANS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE UPCOMING DEMOCRATIC ELECTORAL PROCESS. POST CONTACTS VIEWED THE DECISION AS POSITIVE FOR BOTH JORDAN AND FOR THE KING, BUT ALSO EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN THAT A WAR IN IRAQ COULD LEAD THE GOJ TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS AGAIN.

14. (C) THE GOVERNMENT EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN MEETING WITH POLITICAL PARTIES TO DISCUSS THEIR RESPECTIVE CONCERNS BUT INSISTS THAT THE CURRENT ELECTION FORMULA--ONE MAN-ONE VOTE IN SINGLE MEMBER CONSTITUENCIES--IS FAIR, EFFECTIVE, AND WILL NOT CHANGE. THE IAF INDICATED THAT IT WILL SOON ANNOUNCE WHETHER IT INTENDS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE JUNE ELECTIONS OR BOYCOTT THEM FOR A SECOND TIME.

COMMENT

15. (C) OVERALL, THE KING'S DECISION TO SET AN ELECTION DATE IS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT SINCE MANY POST CONTACTS WERE PREDICTING A FOURTH POSTPONEMENT DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE KING AND GOVERNMENT CHOSE TO HOLD THE ELECTIONS IN MID JUNE INDICATES THAT IT HAS FACTORED THE IRAQ WAR INTO ITS CALCULATIONS AND HOPES THAT BY THEN THE WAR WOULD BE OVER, TEMPERS WILL HAVE CALMED, AND THE ELECTIONS CAN PROCEED AS PLANNED. WE BELIEVE THE KING WANTS TO MOVE AHEAD AS ANNOUNCED, AND WILL DO SO UNLESS THERE IS SERIOUS INSTABILITY IN THE REGION.

16. (C) ALTHOUGH THE IAF HAS YET TO ANNOUNCE WHETHER THEY INTEND TO PARTICIPATE IN THE JUNE ELECTIONS, FEW EXPECT THEM TO ANNOUNCE A BOYCOTT AND RISK AGAIN BEING LEFT OUT OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS. THE GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH AMENABLE TO LISTENING TO THEIR CONCERNS REGARDING THE ELECTIONS LAW, IS UNLIKELY TO ALTER THE STATUS QUO--WHICH EFFECTIVELY LIMITS THE IAF'S ABILITY TO WIN PARLIAMENTARY SEATS.
GNEHM